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ABSTRACT

This paper examines three recent studies of patterns of public participation in educational decision-making conducted by Peshkin, Schaffarzick, and Zeigler, briefly analyzing each study in terms of three models of public policy formation: (1) the traditional democratic or formal bureaucratic model, (2) the technological or empirical bureaucratic model, and (3) the democratic administration model. The author concludes that none of the communities studied by Peshkin, Zeigler, or Schaffarzick offer much hope for participatory democracy, and he therefore argues that more viable models for educational policy-formation must be developed. He then presents the Third-Party Problem-Solving Model, an arrangement where the function of continuous problem-solving is delegated by the school board to a representative group of citizens, educators, nonprofessional school employees, and students. (Author/JG)

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Alternative Models for Community Participation in Curriculum and Educational Policy Making

by

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A Reaction to Papers Prepared by

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for

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Alternative Models for Community Participation in

Curriculum and Other Educational Policy Making

The title of this symposium suggests that my reactions should be focused on a comparison of the roles, issues, and research methods addressed in the three papers just presented. What I intend to do, however, is compare some of the roles and role relationships reported in the three studies, add to such an analysis my own biases, and propose a model that I think resolves some of the issues raised in the three studies. I do not intend to analyze the methodology used in the three studies.

In his introductory statement Zeigler describes two models of public policy formation: the traditional Democratic Model and the Technological Model. In the Democratic Model the public elects a representative legislative body, such as the school board, to make policy; an executive officer and staff are employed to administer policy; and these administrators follow the instructions of the legislative body, who follow the instructions of their constituents. In the Technological Model the legislative body solicits and follows the recommendations of professional administrators.

As Zeigler points out, the major source of power in the Democratic Model is popular electoral support, and the norm of policy making is responsiveness to public desires and preferences. In the Technological Model, on the other hand, the major source of power is information and the norm of policy making is deference to expertise. I intend to employ these two models of decision making in analyzing the three papers, but before I do so, let me elaborate a little upon Zeigler's description of them.

In each of these models, bureaucracy is an essential element of the government. In traditional democratic theory as applied to the American system, the citizen is regarded as autonomous, with certain rights that are simply inalienable. The citizen is the subject and not the object, the actor and not the one acted upon by the agencies of government. The flow of authority is in one direction from the populace to the legislature, from the legislature through the executive to the bureaucracy and from the top down within the bureaucracy. The legislative branch of government performs the functions of bringing citizen interests together and expressing them in policies. Policies are then delegated to the politically neutral bureaucracy for implementation and enforcement in as efficient and disinterested fashion as possible. Thus, in the democratic or formal bureaucratic model, there is a clear distinction between the process of policy development and the process of implementation and enforcement.

The trouble with the formal model of bureaucracy is that it does not describe empirical reality very well (Ostrom 1973). Voth has suggested several reasons why this is so:

1. Organizations simply do not operate in the mechanically efficient manner described by the classical model. Goals are altered, the bureaucracy finds it must come to terms with its environment and makes certain adaptations to do so (Selznick, 1966), and lines of authority are bypassed or subverted. Bureaucracies are not machines.

2. There is no such thing as politically neutral implementation of policy. Even when the most detailed standards of implementation are included in legislation, some discretion must remain for the bureaucrat, and this discretion has at least potential political consequences.

3. Perhaps most significant, however, is the fact that policy cannot even be made without a high level of technical expertise. Ends are meaningless without some consideration of means

available to achieve them. This expertise in means is precisely what the bureaucrat has. Consequently, he becomes intimately involved in the development of legislation itself, and in this way can and does have a profound influence upon the policy formation process.

4. There is another rather subtle philosophical reason for abandoning this model. This is the view that contemplation and action, or planning and action, cannot and should not be separated.

Given this inability to separate implementation from policy formation and the tendency of bureaucracy to dominate because it possesses superior technical expertise, the Technological Model is widely practised in all aspects of government and particularly in the governance of public education.

In the early 1960s, with the growing perception that public education was failing, there was an upsurge of interest in having the public participate in forming educational policy. This movement has resulted in mandated "maximum feasible citizen participation" in every major federally funded educational program. These mandates in turn resulted in what Ostrom describes as "Democratic Administration."

Democratic Administration refers to two different patterns of administration. On the one hand, it refers to organizations which are internally democratic--in which subordinant members are accorded opportunities to influence organizational decisions. On the other hand, Democratic Administration refers to decentralized administration and mechanisms for citizens to have influence upon the decisions of these decentralized units.

This latter form of democratic administration has been proposed as a revolutionary solution to the dilemma of the growing reliance upon technology and the growing pressure for public participation. It is

alleged to allow simultaneously for a strong positive role for professional administration and technology and yet avoid the excesses of bureaucratic domination.

Keeping in mind these three models--(1) the traditional democratic or formal bureaucratic model, (2) the technological or empirircal bureaucratic model, and (3) the democratic administration model--let's look at the three studies of contemporary patterns of educational policy and program decision making.

Feni, the island community in a sea of soybean and corn fields, seems from Peshkin's study, to be a classical expression of the formal bureaucratic model. In Feni the school board's policies always reflect the will of the citizens. Moreover, the board directs the administration in such ways that programs and schooling--even recruitment and selection of staff--accurately reflect the community's preferences and desires. The power stems from the community's norms, and policy making is consistently responsive to those norms. The result is high satisfaction, no issues, and therefore no need for overt public participation. Also, because there are no issues, there is little need for expertise in resolving complex pr blems. And as long as external evaluators place the "Good Housekeeping" seal of approval on the Fenian programs there will be no issues to challenge professional administrators or to divide the populace.

Feni, like many small towns, is hardly conducive to exemplary participatory democracy. Despite its propinquity, intimacy, internal interdependence and simplicity, the rustic form of school governance in places like Feni is not as equitable and idyllic as some might conclude. The spirit of fraternity, described by Peshkin, proceeds on an expectation of essential unanimity, not disagreement. Thus both dissent and the

untrammeled pursuit of truth suffer, for the minority is often unwilling to voice its opinion and risk the social repercussions that might ensue. The very absence of anonymity discourages radical or unpopular suggestions (Wood 1961).

In Barwig Park, Leeville, and Grahamdale, the three school systems selected for consideration by Zeigler, we have a different model in operation--one that, in varying degrees in each of the three communities, has the characteristics of the technological or empirical bureaucratic model. In Grahamdale, according to the Zeigler study, the superintendent dominates the board and his administrative staff in both policy making and administrative decision making. He makes a majority of the proposals, takes a position in almost all cases, and always wins. And, I gather, public input is of little import.

In Barwig Park, the board plays a larger role, but the superintendent, while content to share authority with the staff, sets the agenda, makes his position known, and wins. Public input again is not a significant aspect of the process.

Leeville is not such a clear manifestation of the Technological Model because here the board is much more active, as is the public. However, the superintendent is still the dominant actor and whenever he chooses to take a position, he wins. Also, as Zeigler points out, the interdependence of the city and school district in Leeville creates a bargaining environment between the two boards and between the superintendent and mayor that is not conducive to the utilization of "expert" opinion. The fact that the superintendent does win when he takes a position would seem to confirm that also in Leeville the norm of educational decision making is deference to expertise.

Jon Schaffarzick studied 34 districts in a large metropolitan area. While he examines teacher and lay participation in curriculum decision making only, it would appear that all of these districts manifest to some extent the characteristics of the democratic administrative model. However, while teacher participation in these districts has increased, it is still on a small scale and does not include major decisions such as decisions to adopt or reject suggested changes. Likewise, lay participation has increased but is often superficial, except when lay persons unitedly fight for a change that is of strong concern to them. In these instances, according to Schaffarzick, board members and professional educators tend to listen. Also, in such cases "new procedures are frequently developed to facilitate lay involvement, lay persons' views often prevail, and lay persons sometimes remain involved through implementation of desired change in order to ensure that their views are not subverted."

A major problem with the democratic administration model is that public participation in policy formulation is "sponsored" participation, i.e., citizens participate at the invitation of the school administration or bureaucracy rather than of the school board or legislative body. Thus the bureaucracy is engaged in an activity that in principle should be the sole function of the legislative body--harvesting public interest and preference and using it to develop policy. Also, school administrators and their staffs are primarily concerned with program results. To the degree they take seriously their governmental accountability, they cannot turn control to a local organ of citizen participation. Under democratic administration a duly organized citizen group can either allow itself to be entirely co-opted by the school administration, or it must attempt to

gain control of the program. We have instances of each in the literature. Schaffarzick's study seems to indicate that in the 34 districts he studied, both lay and teacher participation are controlled by the school administration.

This brings me to my bias. In my view, none of the communities studied by Peshkin, Zeigler and Schaffarzick provide very much encouragement that participatory democracy will work; and my bias tells me that if public education is to survive in America, indeed if American democracy is to survive, we must find more appropriate and viable models for educational policy formulation and program decision making than we now have. Such a model in my view must satisfy some critical requirements. It must

1. preserve the sovereignty of the general public in determining public policy
2. preserve the separation of powers by attaching public participation to legislative bodies, not to bureaucracies
3. minimize or eliminate competition among the various governmental jurisdictions for the same people to perform similar functions
4. facilitate the utilization of time by providing adequate staff support in organizing information, making meeting arrangements, etc., and timing public participation to critical steps in the decision-making process.
5. provide access to a high level of technical expertise in policy formulation while guaranteeing that people do not rely too much on expertise or defer to it
6. There must be a significant investment of public funds in helping citizens learn effective procedures and acquire essential participation skills.

Are there any such alternatives around? One that goes quite a way toward meeting these requirements is an alternative that Lavern Cunningham has been using in Detroit and one that undergirds a significant piece of NIE-funded development work currently being conducted by the Rural Education Program of the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory in Portland, Oregon. In Detroit it is called Third-Party Problem Solving; at the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory it is called the Rural Futures Development Strategy, which applies the principles of third-party problem solving to rural settings.

In this model the major source of power is a blend of academic knowledge with public understanding and support. The norm of educational decision making is to integrate responsiveness to public preferences with professional expertise in the areas of child growth and development, instructional methodology, and institutional organization and management.

This model suggests that instead of turning only to experts for help, legislative bodies turn to the "people" for help when the everyday responsibilities of government become too complex or burdensome to carry.

The organizing or systematizing of public input into governmental processes has taken many forms and proceeds under several names. "Task force" is currently very popular; "commission," "committee," and "panel" are also widely used. In each case, citizens are asked to assist with the affairs of government or of administration. While most invitations for public participation are genuine, in some cases as Schaffarzick suggests, "bringing in the public" is used as a stalling tactic or a defusing strategy in explosive situations. Sometimes public representatives are only expected to represent public opinion. In other instances

they are provided both the resources and expectation to utilize expertise and tap into sophisticated knowledge sources for the information needed for more rational decision making.

In the Third-Party Problem Solving Model the function of continuous problem solving is delegated to a representative group of citizens, educators, nonprofessional school employees, and students. The citizen members are selected so that they represent the diverse "opinion groups" in the community. Because the group is created by the school board, it is a legitimate problem-solving agent. Because it does not dispense resources, it must continue to work hand in hand with the board. However, it is not the board's captive, but is free to differ with the board and administration on issues, problems, and sclutions.

This group is expected to construct its own problem-solving agenda but enlists the participation of school officials in that process. In its work the group stays with a problem until, in its judgement, the problem has been satisfactorily resolved. It reports regularly and formally to the board, presenting recommendations, complete with documentation, plans for implementation, and cost estimates. In preparing its recommendations, the group utilizes expertise and data.

The problem-solving group also builds collaborative working relationships with the organized profession of teachers and administrators, with the school board and with the school staff, if it is working in a small district or single attendance area. From its somewhat external vantage point, the group works in the interests of the clients of the schools through this pattern of collaboration. In doing so, the group performs important functions.

1. It identifies, defines and analyzes problems; searches for a workable solution among the various alternatives available; and acts to get this solution implemented.
2. It convenes persons from disparate interests and sections of the community to examine issues and provides a forum for the intelligent review of prominent issues and problems.
3. It acts as proxy for disparate community and professional interests. Its heterogeneous membership reflects the sentiments, values and beliefs of many segments of the community and educational professions. It mediates these diverse points of view and translates preferences into recommended policy decisions. Thus it becomes a filter of community feeling and an arbiter of public interest.
4. It serves as a link between grass roots sentiment and the proposals of professional educators, at the same time providing an important channel to the sources of power and influence in the community. Thus, grass roots sentiment about issues or proposed solutions can readily be tested or the perspectives of those thought to be in the power structure can be quickly assessed.
5. Through the informal network of associations, businesses and friends to which its members belong, the group can identify and procure the expertise it needs on any issue.
6. It serves to clarify and legitimize the goals and directions of the school system.
7. It provides leadership for change. It can ask old questions in new ways, raise new questions and get existing forces together in new configurations to look at issues from new perspectives.

> While it works with and through the established school structure, it has an independence, a life of its own. Furthermore, it has an impartiality about it which protects its independence and allows it to affect the lives of people and institutions from the vantage point of neutral "turf." It is this impartiality that earns respect.

Of course, members of the problem-solving group do not come spontaneously by the capabilities they need if they are to function effectively. Therefore, sufficient resources must be invested in building three kinds of skills for participation: (1) skill in performing the various problem-solving tasks such as utilizing data and expertise, analyzing problems, and selecting from among alternative solutions, (2) skill in working successfully in groups, including skill in managing conflict, and communicating effectively, and (3) skill in collaborating with other groups.

Also, the group is provided with help from the school staff to carry out some of its between meeting work and to ensure that the time spent in meetings is productive.

Hopefully others are also working to develop alternatives to democratic administration as a mechanism for dealing with the problems of bureaucracy and the growing complexities of educational and other social problems. As Alvin Toffler has pointed out,

> "We have seen, in the history of planning, continual efforts to standardize information, to centralize it, to concentrate power, to embrace larger and larger units or systems within the plan and to add experts. All of that adds up to industrial-style planning, technocratic planning. This industrial mentality is now being challenged by an alternative consciousness. It is being challenged not only by angry people who might be called 'plannees'--people who are planned upon--but by many people who do not know they are plannees. In fact, we are all consumers-of-

> plans, and consumer revolt will continue to occur as more and more of the life-support systems in this society begin to break down. Technocratic planning, like bureaucracy, is designed for undifferentiated or simple industrial societies and for slow-change conditions. But the U.S. is no longer a traditional industrial society, let alone a simple one. Hence we need a radically different approach to planning."

There is a tremendous amount of pent-up political emotion in this country. People feel that their freedoms are being subverted and the future is being bumbled away. Although we need experts, ways must be found to involve ordinary people in the planning/problem solving process. We need a whole new way of relating to experts so that their knowledge and skill can be brought to bear upon solving our social, cultural and political problems. However, these problems, if they are to be solved in ways that build the capacities of people, promote freedom, nurture diversity, and protect human dignity and autonomy, must be solved by the people themselves.

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